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ABSTRACT

The business communication course, required in most colleges and schools of business, may be the best place for language educators to begin to help globalize the curriculum. In these courses, students are taught communication theory, business writing, oral business communication, leadership, meeting participation, and various functions used in daily business. Language educators and their business education counterparts can work together to internationalize this portion of the curriculum. Through the course, students can become prepared to solve business problems in ways that consider cultural differences as an important variable, and can learn to prevent or minimize written, oral, and nonverbal communication problems in the workplace. Eastern Michigan University has established such a course combining traditional business communication with intercultural communication. In it, students must write a marketing report including audience analysis, product analysis, development of a sales plan, and implementation and follow-up using insights gained from the internationalized course content. (MSE)

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A LANGUAGE EDUCATOR'S FIRST SALE: TO GLOBALIZE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Business Communication, a required course for most colleges and schools of business, may be the best place for language educators to begin to help globalize the curriculum. In this course students are taught communication theory, business writing, oral business communication, leadership, meeting participation and various functions used in daily business. This paper describes how this course is currently being internationalized and how language educators could help their business colleagues. In business communication, students must become prepared to solve business problems in ways which consider cultural variance as an important variable. In business communication, a business educator can discuss problem prevention or at least problem minimization as it relates to written, oral and nonverbal communication in the workplace. It is here that the language educator can be of most help.

INTRODUCTION

Business communication is a required course at Eastern Michigan University in the College of Business and at most other colleges and universities. Following will be a description of the EMU course, an explanation of how we have attempted to internationalize it and how very much remains to be accomplished. Language educators can be a valuable resource for business educators, but business educators must be sold on the idea. The plan for marketing the language educator's ideas and skills will conclude this paper.

DESCRIPTION

At Eastern Michigan University, approximately 4,000 students have declared one of the undergraduate business majors. All are required to take the business communication course which is taught in the Management Department. In addition, business communication is required in several other campus majors and it is sometimes taken as an elective. It is a sophomore level course which is required prior to admission into the College of Business and prior to taking junior and senior level courses. In the fall and winter semesters usually eighteen sections of 32 students are filled and in spring 4 sections with summer semester usually filling 3 or 4 sections. Normally about 1,400 students take the course per year.

In the course, students are evaluated upon written and oral communication and upon knowledge of theory. They are required to write a good deal, including memoranda, letters, reports, critiques and evaluations. Students are also tested upon course

content and upon their ability to present ideas orally. Course content includes the following categories: communication theory and concepts; written communication; oral communication; interpersonal communication; organizational communication; and intercultural/international communication. Each category is allotted a number of class periods as indicated in figure 1.(see appendix) Also in the same figure one can view the sub topics which are covered by all instructors in business communication.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

As can be seen, the last category in figure 1 is intercultural/international communication. According to the charge of the accrediting organization, the AACSB, all member schools must globalize all courses. Clearly this audience does not have to be sold upon this concept; but colleagues in colleges and schools of business need some convincing of the concept and they need help in implemeting this change. Currently at Eastern Michigan University, all business communication classes view at least two of the fine videotapes produced by Griggs and Copeland entitled "Going International". These tapes are available for viewing this evening and I urge the audience members to view them. We have found them to be an excellent resource for use with undergraduate students who lack experience and contact with other cultures.

In addition, in my own business communication course, I discuss some of the variables of intercultural contact throughout the course. Because I have a foreign language background plus foreign living experience, I am able to integrate the concepts within the entire course. They are included in my class

discussion of theory, of written communication, of oral communication, of interpersonal communication, and of organizational communication. Not all business educators however, are lucky enough to have such a diverse background; most do not. Therefore many of us simply play the tapes, lead a discussion and then close the issue.

Language educators know better than that. The issue cannot simply be closed and shelved. Our students need cultural competence in order to survive and flourish in today's business. This must be continuously reinforced. As has been said, there really is no difference now in domestic and international business. All business is international and in all business dealings we must communicate with people of other cultures. Therefore students and professors of business must both be urged to integrate cultural concepts throughout the course.

MARKETING

In the business communication course, students are asked to research and write an analytical report. Language educators should go through much the same process. They must do an assessment, develop and market a plan and evaluate that plan.

Audience Analysis

In the first step, the audience must be analyzed. The audience in this case is the course, the text, the professors.

Appropriate questions would include:

* Is this course one which can be globalized? (nature of the content)
* Are there particular portions of the course which lend themselves more easily to being globalized? (content)
* Is there likely to be resistance to globalizing this course? (professors, students, departments)
* Does the text refer to globalization and could this be built upon? (text)

Product Analysis

The product in this case is the language educator. What skills does the language educator possess which could be useful in helping colleagues globlalize their courses? Is the language educator familiar with the leading business journals such as the Harvard Business Review, the Academy of Management Journal and even the Wall Street Journal? Just as the language of sales and marketing is the language of the client or customer, the language of this sale is the language of the business educator. A familiarity with the language is easy to acquire. Most libraries have the major business journals. Additional language can be acquired from other faculty and from texts.

Development of sales plan

Based upon the language educator's evaluation of self, and of the course and its variables, a plan for globalization must be developed. Along with that, the language educator must develop a strategy for how to present the plan to faculty. Should it be a bit by bit, gradual introduction of an article here and there, or should it be a major "dog and pony" show to all the department? Or should it be somewhere in between? One aspect of the success of any plan would be the openness of the language educator to

modification of the plan. If the business faculty want to "own" or accept part of the responsibility for the change, there must be open channels of communication for the language educator to be receptive to these changes. Open communication doesn't just miraculously happen; structure must be in place to encourage it and attitudes must reflect a team approach, not strictly the idea that the language educator will enlighten the "ignorant" business educator!

Implementation and follow-up

Once the feedback has been gathered and utilized, the plan which seems most appropriate for the situation should be put in place. It is important for the language educator to maintain contact with colleagues to help with problems and to encourage and support. Change is always difficult and business educators are prone to the same problems as others. In addition, after the semester or quarter is complete, the language and business educators must work together to assess what went right and what should be modified to be more effective.

CONCLUSION

Because of the nature of the content, the business communication course is an excellent place to globalize. Use of videotapes such as "Going International" is a sound beginning. But in order to integrate the intercultural concepts throughout the course, help must be given to business educators. Many are at a loss to know how to globalize their courses and as is true with any change, it is threatening. Therefore the perceptive language educator will develop the appropriate persuasive

strategy in conjunction with the business colleagues.

There is no more important issue to schools and colleges of business today. The AACSB urges us to globalize, as do businesses and as do the journals. The biggest problem is in knowing how to go about this process. It is here that the language educator can be of invaluable help. When business and language educators work together, students benefit, the educators and their respective departments benefit, and even the shrinking world will benefit from improved understanding.

APPENDIX

MANAGEMENT 202
BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Course Content:

A. Communication Theory/Concepts (6)*
   1. Definitions, theories, models
   2. Technologically mediated communication
   3. Perception
   4. Language/Semantics
   5. Nonverbal/Intercultural Communication
   6. Audience Analysis
   7. Listening
   8. Ethical & Legal Considerations
   9. Audience Analysis

B. Written Communication (21)*
   1. Receiver/Audience Analysis
   2. Organization & Logical Development
   3. Style, Tone, Readability
   4. Credibility (ethics)
   5. Problem Solving Approaches
   6. Persuasive Strategies/Consensus Making
   7. Direct requests, good & bad news, persuasive & goodwill --letters and memos
   8. Informational and Analytical reports
   9. Resumes & Application letters
   10. Graphics

C. Oral Communication (9)*
   1. Interviewing
   2. Individual presentations
   3. Group presentations
   4. Visual Aids

D. Interpersonal Communication (3)*
   1. Transactional Communication
   2. Group Problem Solving
   3. Meeting Management & Agenda Setting

E. Organizational Communication (3)*
   1. Formal and Informal Channels and Barriers
   2. Staff Function
   3. Managerial/Leadership Style

F. Intercultural/International Business Communication
   1. Stereotypes
   2. Acculturation
   3. Culture Shock

* Each number refers to the approximate number of 50 minute class periods devoted to that subject matter in a 15 week semester.